



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 30, 2004

Mr. Christopher Gregg
Gregg & Gregg
16055 Space Center Road, Suite 150
Houston, Texas 77062

OR2004-10050

Dear Mr. Gregg:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 214847.

The City of Webster Police Department (the "department"), which you represent, received a request for copies of a specified offense report. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Subsections 552.301(a) and (b) of the Government Code provide:

(a) A governmental body that receives a written request for information that it wishes to withhold from public disclosure and that it considers to be within one of the [act's] exceptions . . . must ask for a decision from the attorney general about whether the information is within that exception if there has not been a previous determination about whether the information falls within one of the exceptions.

(b) The governmental body must ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions that apply within a reasonable time but not later than the 10th business day after the date of receiving the written request.

Although the department states it received the request for information on September 20, 2004, the request has a stamp that shows the department received the request for information on September 13, 2004. Your request for a decision from this office was postmarked on October 1, 2004. Consequently, you failed to request a decision within the ten business day

period mandated by section 552.301(a) of the Government Code. Because the request for a decision was not timely submitted, the requested information is presumed to be public information. Gov't Code § 552.302.

In order to overcome the presumption that the requested information is public information, a governmental body must provide compelling reasons why the information should not be disclosed. *Id.*; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ); see Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). The department has waived its interest under section 552.108. Gov't Code § 552.302. However, the need of a governmental body, other than the agency that is seeking an open records decision, to withhold information under section 552.108 of the Government Code may be a compelling reason for non-disclosure. Open Records Decision 586 (1991). Section 552.108 excepts from disclosure:

(a) Information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if:

(1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]

Gov't Code § 552.108(a). In this instance, the department submits an email from the District Attorney's Office from County Court of Law #15. The email states that the "cases have already been pled so it's not a major issue any more, but just as a matter of policy we'd prefer not to have [the information] released." We do not find that the District Attorney's Office has shown the applicability of section 552.108 and therefore has not provided a compelling reason to overcome the presumption that the information at issue is public.

The Office of the Attorney General will raise mandatory exceptions like sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987). Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 552.101 encompasses common law privacy. Where an individual's criminal history information has been compiled by a governmental entity, the information takes on a character that implicates the individual's right to privacy. See *United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749 (1989). We have marked the information that must be withheld under common law privacy as encompassed by section 552.101 of the Government Code. See *id.*

Social security numbers may be withheld in some circumstances under section 552.101 of the Government Code. A social security number or "related record" may be excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with the 1990 amendments to the federal Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I). See Open Records Decision No. 622 (1994). These amendments make confidential social security numbers and related records that are obtained and maintained by a state agency or political subdivision of the state pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990. See *id.* We have no

basis for concluding that any of the social security numbers in the file are confidential under section 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I), and therefore excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101 on the basis of that federal provision. We caution, however, that section 552.352 of the Public Information Act imposes criminal penalties for the release of confidential information. Prior to releasing any social security number, you should ensure that no such information was obtained or is maintained by the department pursuant to any provision of law, enacted on or after October 1, 1990.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure information that relates to:

- (1) a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state;
- (2) a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state; or
- (3) a personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or a local agency authorized to issue an identification document.

Gov't Code § 552.130(a). The submitted information contains Texas driver's license numbers and Texas license plate numbers. The information we have marked must be withheld from the public under section 552.130.¹

In summary, the department must withhold the criminal history record information that we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common law privacy. Social security numbers that were obtained and maintained by the department pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990, must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I) of the Social Security Act. The marked Texas license plate numbers and driver's license numbers must also be withheld under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The remainder of the submitted information must be released to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full

¹We note that the arrest warrant and supporting affidavit must be released in their entirety under article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

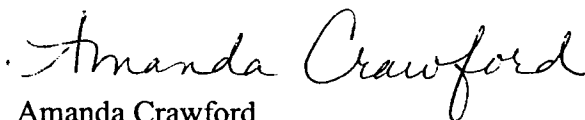
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Amanda Crawford
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

AEC/sdk

Ref: ID# 214847

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Debbie Kasper
5644 Westheimer #405
Houston, Texas 77036
(w/o enclosures)